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THE SPIRIT OF THE SERB.

R. W. SETON-WATSON.

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THE SERB

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BY

R. W. SETON-WATSON

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THE SPIRIT OF THE SERB

THERE is a Serbian proverb which says, "Victory is not won by shining arms, but by brave hearts"; and I cannot find a better motto for my remarks about Serbia and the spirit of the Serbs. For so far as this war is concerned, the proverb is thoroughly typical of the bravery and stubborn self-reliance with which they have held their own for the past seven months. When war first broke out, those of us who were interested in Serbia and the Balkans felt it almost necessary to apologize for the importance of the south-eastern front and Serbia's share in the war. At first we were, naturally enough, engrossed with the western theatre of war, where our own gallant troops are fighting; and many of us were apt to forget that besides Belgium, which has suffered so terribly—*for us*—there is another small country at our side, the Belgium of the East, Serbia, who has been fighting all alone against terrible odds, and who, alone of all our Continental Allies (be it said without reproach!), is in the proud position of having expelled every enemy from her native soil. Cynics will tell us that nothing succeeds like success; and it is certainly true that Serbia's victories have aroused an interest

which her misfortunes never aroused. But I think it is fairer to say that the fog is lifting, and that we are beginning to see more clearly the general proportions of the war. To-day it is being more and more widely admitted that Serbia has triumphantly vindicated her position in the ranks of the Allies, and has rendered signal services to the common cause, such as entitle her to every consideration at the settlement which ends the war.

Without going into the details of the campaign, I think it is worth while to summarize briefly what Serbia has actually accomplished. You will remember that when Austria-Hungary last July declared war upon Serbia, and thus set a match to the European powder magazine, she arrogantly announced that her action was to be a "Punitive Expedition." Since then she has made the bitter discovery that two can play at that game. There has been plenty of punishing, but it has not been by Austria-Hungary on Serbia, but by gallant little Serbia on her unwieldy northern neighbour. It is hardly necessary to point out that part of the calculations of the Central Powers was a "walk-over" down the valley of the Morava, the strategic backbone of the Serbian kingdom, through which alone Austria-Hungary can gain access to that goal of all her Balkan dreams, the great Ægean port of Salonica. But instead of swiftly overrunning Serbia, the Austrian armies were held at bay for well over a fortnight along the rivers Save and Danube, which form the northern boundary of the

little kingdom, and then when they at last advanced in force on the north-west, from Bosnia and Slavonia, they were driven back, after a fiercely contested nine days' battle at and around Jadar, into their own territory (August 16-25). A second Austrian offensive was repulsed towards the middle of September at what is known for convenience' sake as the battle of the Drina. A month later came the third and biggest wave. Large reinforcements were hurried up, and six weeks of desultory fighting ensued, the Serbs being gradually compelled to evacuate the north-western districts and Belgrade and to withdraw towards defensive positions in the centre of the country. Even then, it should be remembered, the Serbs had only fallen back to a line where many competent critics had expected to see them within the first fortnight of the war. The prime cause of this retreat was that Serbia's ammunition—ordered, and even paid for, in France some months before the war, but never delivered—was rapidly running short. One officer told me that in his particular section of the trenches a thousand Austrian shells were replied to by three Serbian; and this incident is typical of a situation which had had a fatal effect upon the *moral* of officers and men alike. It was this critical moment which was selected by Bulgarian komitadjis, with the connivance of Sofia, and probably at the instigation of Vienna, to blow up one of the main railway bridges on the Vardar valley, and thus to block for eight precious days the transit of war material along

the only available railway line from Salonica, Serbia's only available port.

For a short time it seemed as though the Austrians were about to carry all before them, and more than one Serbian statesman was hinting openly of impending disaster. And then at last the long-delayed ammunition began to arrive. Early in December there was a sudden and desperate rally, which took the invaders completely by surprise. Rudnik has given its name to the great battle which covered a front of fifty miles. First the Austrian right was driven back in utter confusion on Valjevo, and then pursued across the Drina and the Save, leaving thousands of prisoners and a rich booty in the hands of the Serbs; then the centre was forced to retire, and finally the defeat of the left wing rendered the hasty evacuation of Belgrade inevitable. By the middle of December not a single armed Austrian remained on Serbian soil.

This magnificent rally of the Serbian arms, which will unquestionably go down to history as one of the finest achievements of the great war, was, above all, due to the timely arrival of those munitions of war without which no soldier in the world can hope for victory. But an important contributory cause—of the kind calculated to influence so impressionable a race as the Serb—was the gallant behaviour of the old King, who, though infirm and broken with rheumatic gout, hurried to the front at the most critical moment and gave a stirring address to his troops. Classical authors were fond of composing elaborate

summaries of what various generals and statesmen ought to have said, but most probably did not say, on similar occasions; but in this case I can vouch for the general sense, though not for the actual words. "Heroes," he said (for in the Serbian language the usual form of address is not "soldiers," but "heroes" —the fine old mediæval "junaci"), "heroes, you have taken two oaths: one to me, your King, and one to your country. From the first I release you, for the situation is far too grave to justify me, an old man on the edge of the grave, in holding you to it. From the oath to your country no man can release you. But I promise you that if you decide to return to your homes, and if fortune favours our cause, you shall not be made to suffer. But whether you go or stay, I and my sons remain here." Needless to say, the effect of such a speech was electrical, and not a man left his post.

On the last occasion on which I told this anecdote, my chairman reminded me of the resemblance to Henry V's famous speech before Agincourt; and it is certain that King Peter, who as a young man translated Stuart Mill's essay on Liberty into Serb, knows his Shakespeare also. But I cannot help wondering whether the splendid response which met his words did not recall to his mind another incident but little known to Western readers—the cry of the Serb nobles to the greatest of the Serbian Tsars, Stephen Dušan: "Wherever thou leadest us, most glorious Tsar, we will follow thee." There is the true spirit of the Serb.

In this connexion I cannot help quoting another thoroughly characteristic incident which also occurred at the same low ebb of Serbia's fortunes. General Stepanović, one of Serbia's ablest generals, had been made a Voivode, or Marshal, for his services at an earlier stage of the campaign. When the retreat became general and spirits fell, he called up one of his favourite regiments and addressed them as follows: "Heroes, it is to your valour and achievements that I owe my appointment as a Voivode. You are no longer worthy of your past, and unless you mend your ways, I shall tear off these epaulettes and fling them at your feet!" That, too, is typical of the Serbian spirit.

What, then, does Serbia's achievement mean to the common cause? To begin with, the Serbs were the first to deal a blow at the prestige of Austria-Hungary, and, conjointly with Belgium at the other end of Europe, they supplied eloquent proof of what national feeling can do against heavy odds. Secondly, they kept fully occupied large military forces which might otherwise have been diverted to the Western or to the Galician fronts. According to a Hungarian official estimate—an estimate which, coming from the enemy, is hardly likely to err on the side of over-statement—the losses incurred by Austria-Hungary against Serbia alone up to November 1 were no fewer than 148,000 (38,438 killed, 92,955 wounded, and 17,208 prisoners).¹ During the fighting last November and December, at least 100,000 more must have been

¹ *Morning Post*, November 18, 1914.

placed *hors de combat*; and it is a notorious fact that the beaten Austrian army was so completely demoralized as to be useless for any further offensive movement.¹ Thus we shall not be guilty of exaggeration if we assume that Serbia has from first to last accounted for half a million of the enemy, including those killed, wounded, captured, and broken in *moral*.

Above all, Serbia has formed a rampart between the Central Powers and Turkey, a fatal flaw in the design which extended from Berlin to Bagdad, from Vienna and Budapest to Salonica. The operations at the Dardanelles are revealing to the man in the street what ought even before to have been fairly obvious—the true value and significance of Serbia to the allied cause. Her destruction would enable the Germans to relieve the beleaguered Turks, to replenish their dwindling stores of ammunition, and even to stiffen their army with fresh troops; it would drive Bulgaria willy-nilly into the arms of the Dual Alliance; it would finally isolate Russia and Roumania from Western Europe, and, by cutting off the latter's war supplies, would virtually force her to abandon her dreams of conquest; and incidentally it would place the Central Powers in possession of one of the most valuable copper mines in Europe.

Thus our own vital interests are clearly involved

¹ In the final rout of the Austrians the Serbs took 37,000 prisoners, exclusive of several thousand wounded soldiers whom the enemy had to abandon in their haste. There were already 17,000 prisoners. This gives a total of 54,000 unwounded prisoners, or close on 60,000 all told.

in the maintenance of Serbia as a fighting force. She has borne the burden and heat of the day, she has rendered signal services to the allied cause, and her valour has finally dispersed the calumnies with which her enemies so long assailed her reputation.

At this stage I cannot do better than say something of the Serbian army. It does not merely typify, it is identical with, the Serbian nation; for nation and army are one in a sense which we in our island fastness still only dimly comprehend. The shadow of a hideous crime perpetrated twelve years ago had obscured its reputation, and foreign opinion had completely overlooked the rapid growth of a new spirit within its ranks, until its splendid victories in the first Balkan War against the Turks, and the no less splendid victories of its melancholy sequel the war against Bulgaria, supplied a highly practical and unmistakable proof. To a Scotsman there comes a natural temptation to recognize among the modern Serbs some of those rugged fighting qualities which his ancestors developed under the inspiring leadership of Wallace and of Bruce. Two years ago I had an opportunity of observing the Serbian army at close quarters; for I spent five weeks travelling in Serbian Macedonia on the eve of the second Balkan War, made the acquaintance of a great many officers of all ranks, was repeatedly entertained at mess, and visited many of their camps and garrison towns. No one who has had such an experience can fail to be struck by the almost ideal relations which exist between officers and men, the

charming blend of discipline and comradeship. Some people may think this natural enough in an army where a captain may often have his brothers and cousins in his own company; but there are other peasant armies where it is not to be found. But certainly the Serbian army is permeated with the democratic spirit in the best sense of the word. Just as it is customary to address the troops as a whole as "heroes," so the officers summon their men to the fight, not as "men," but as "brothers." After the day's work was over, it was pleasant to see officers and men together dancing the Kolo, the famous national dance of the Serb, and yet to realize that this—according to Prussian standards—monstrous familiarity did not for a moment impair the strict discipline which is indispensable to every army. Those who judge armies by the goose-step or by parade uniforms will not have much praise for the Serbian army (though even here it is worth pointing out that its field-kit is one of the smartest in Europe); but as a fighting machine, seasoned by the rough-and-tumble experiences of two recent campaigns, it cannot be valued too highly within the limits prescribed by a country of four million inhabitants.

Here are a few anecdotes to illustrate these democratic relations and the primitive outlook which underlies them.

In the first Balkan War a Serbian regiment found itself threatened by superior forces of the enemy and was forced to retire. Of the men serving the machine-guns, all but one were killed or wounded;

but this man, instead of withdrawing with his comrades, continued to work his gun with fiendish energy and did great execution among the advancing Turks. At last the latter, not realizing that he stood alone and fearing a trap, retired in their turn, and thus on that section of the front the situation had been saved by the courage of a single man. His exploit was duly reported to the general, who sent for him next day. The gunner came, saluted, and stood before him. The general greeted him with a ferocious scowl, and said, "You're a terrible fellow. What's this I hear of you? They tell me it was a regular massacre. How many men did you kill?" The gunner, much perturbed at such a reception, stammered out his belief that certainly well over a hundred men must have fallen victims to his machine-gun. "Well," said the general, still frowning, "there's nothing for it but to make you a corporal." "Oh, general," exclaimed the man, who had expected some kind of punishment. "And now, Corporal —, I make you a sergeant." "Oh, general," gasped the man, speechless with astonishment. "And now, Sergeant —," the general went on, "I make you a lieutenant." The new officer burst out crying. "And now," cried the general, "*now embrace me!*"

Surely there is something Napoleonic about such a tale as this. It is redolent of the days of Ney and Murat and Bernadotte. But my other anecdotes take us many centuries further back. I remember being told by a charming Serbian major what difficulties he

had experienced during the Balkan War in holding his men back under artillery fire. They were always for rushing on at any risk. Once, when he remonstrated seriously with them for their folly, some of them explained that they did not mean to disobey orders, they merely wanted to "get inside the curve" (of the shells!).

One of the chief concerns of the Serbian soldiers is to avoid being wounded in the head; and some of them, in the early days of that war, finding from practical experience that the effect of shrapnel fire was very greatly reduced by earthworks, tried to apply the same principle to themselves, by plastering their caps with a good layer of mud!

At the battle of Bakurna Gumna the Serbian infantry had to advance across an open plain, without a particle of cover, against entrenched Turkish positions. On one of the hills above the battlefield is perched the ruined castle of Marko Kraljević, Mark the King's son, the most famous hero of Serbian legend, whose name still lives in the popular poetry of the race. The Turkish positions were stormed, and next day some officers visited their wounded men in the field hospitals and praised them for their gallantry. The answer came: "With Marko Kraljević to help us, it was easy enough"; and it transpired that more than one soldier had seen Marko on his famous grey charger, Šarac, splashing through the mud before them and waving them on to victory. No argument could shake their

fond belief in a delusion as old as the famous day of Lake Regillus.

Let me try to sum up, very sketchily and imperfectly, the Serb character. The Serb is gay, genial, open, hospitable, very friendly to strangers, talkative, not to say garrulous, but after interminable and quite needless talk about what is to be done, ready to do it with a rush! He is easily roused to enthusiasm, but changeable and prone to sudden fits of depression. His mercurial tendency to spring from the seventh heaven to the deepest hell and back again—a tendency very noticeable during the present war—has made superficial observers call him “the Frenchman of the Balkans.” Certainly no greater contrast could be imagined than that between him and his Bulgarian neighbour, so persevering and so obstinate, so reserved and suspicious, far less imaginative and slower to grasp a situation, but never renouncing an idea which has once entered his head. It is this fundamental difference of psychology which is the real inner cause of that regrettable quarrel between the two Balkan neighbours.

The Serb peasant is a perfect gentleman, in the truest sense of that much-abused word. Nothing is more remarkable than the testimony of the nurses and doctors who have gone out to Serbia, knowing nothing of the country or its ways. Not all are unqualified in their praise of the educated class, but none can speak too highly of the peasant. He never complains and is always full of gratitude and tact towards those who nurse him. The head

doctor of a large neutral hospital said to me as he showed me round the wards, which were filled with a medley of Serbs and Austrian prisoners of every race in the Habsburg monarchy, "If you see a man complaining, you may be sure he is not a Serb!"

Though chock-full of sentiment, the Serb, like most peasants, is a shrewd man of business—more especially the Serb of Croatia and Southern Hungary, who has the commercial instinct to a marked degree and has in recent years steadily outclassed his Croat, Magyar, and even German neighbours in trade and local organization. His kinsman, the Croat, on the other hand, is a sheer romanticist and individualist. Politically the most quarrelsome of all the Slavs—and that is saying a good deal—he suffers from the artistic temperament, though under happier circumstances the defects of his qualities will soon be thrown into the shade by his very sterling merits. In Bosnia Turkish influence has introduced among Serb and Croat alike something of the fatalist element; while in Dalmatia the Southern Slav nature is more complex than ever owing to the admixture of Italian influence. The Dalmatian Croats will play a great part in the new Southern Slav State. In them the subtleness and aloofness of the Italian mind have been grafted upon a nature that is at once childish and reckless, full of the poetry of the sea and the initiative which the mariner is bound to learn. To Italy again may be traced the caustic wit which vents itself in many a modern pasquinade, and which before the war

could be studied in *Duje Balavac*, a comic paper published in Spalato by a small group of Croat artists and caricaturists. Here again two anecdotes will suffice.

Last winter when the Austrian Landsturm (the last line of defence) was called to the colours and the usual medical tests were dispensed with, a notice was found one morning appended to some of the tombs in the ancient cemetery of Spalato, with the words, "Arise, ye dead! Ye, too, are required to fight for the Emperor Francis Joseph." The police, with that lack of humour which has always characterized the Austrian police and has done so much to alienate the witty Dalmatians from the bureaucrats who rule them, promptly offered a reward of £80 for information regarding the author of this joke. Next day, underneath the police proclamation a new placard was discovered: "Before communicating the name of the offending party, we beg to inquire whether the reward will be paid in gold, or in the new Austrian notes."

During the first three weeks of the first Balkan War boundless enthusiasm was displayed by the Croats and Serbs of Dalmatia for their victorious Balkan kinsmen, and the national anthems of the Allies were continually sung by crowds in the streets—among others, the Montenegrin hymn, composed by the Serb poet-king Nicholas, and, I may add, very charmingly translated by Sir Arthur Evans, when as a young man he took part in the Bosnian rising against Turkish misrule. Its opening words,

“Onamo, ’namo” (literally, “thither, thither”), express the writer’s belief in the day when his men shall go to deliver the ancient Serb capital of Prizren “out there beyond the mountains.” When all of a sudden the Dalmatian police strictly forbade the singing of this hymn, the students invented a new version, which began “Ovamo, ’vamo” (“hither, hither”)—thus conveying in a skilfully veiled form their wish that Montenegrin troops might find their way, not to Prizren, but to Dalmatia !

What I have said of the democratic spirit in the Serbian army applies to the nation as a whole. There is no aristocracy, for the Turks took care to exterminate it. There is only a very small middle class, for there are hardly any industries in the modern sense. Serbia is essentially a peasant State, and her statesmen, her diplomats, and her writers are all alike of recent peasant origin. Even the grandfather of the present king, and the great-grandfather of the late king, the founders of the two dynasties whose rivalry brought such injury upon Serbia, were merely well-to-do peasants, distinguished from their neighbours by superior energy and initiative. To-day the land is well distributed, almost every peasant owning a few acres of his own. On the one hand there are no large proprietors as in Roumania ; on the other, poverty and destitution were virtually unknown until the horrors of this war came upon the little kingdom.

It is not my present purpose to inflict upon you an historical disquisition. Serbia, as is well known, is

a Slavonic State ; indeed, so far as purity of race is concerned, she probably holds the primacy among all Slav races. She looks to Russia as to the big Slavonic brother and to the eldest son of Orthodoxy ; but, despite the traditional ties of sympathy between Belgrade and Petrograd, the actual links which bind the little peasant community with the northern auto-cracy are curiously slender—in fact, far more slender than those which subsist between Belgrade and Paris, or, indeed, even Vienna or Budapest.

The whole of Serbian history is dominated by one overpowering fact—the secular struggle against the Turks. Some people still talk glibly of Balkan savagery ; perhaps I should say “talked,” for with the fate of Belgium and Northern France before our eyes, less is heard to-day of such cheap criticism. What I feel bound to insist upon is this. We have no right ever to forget that the backwardness of the Balkans is due to that Turkish hoof under which, according to the proverb, the grass never grows, and that the Serb, the Bulgarian, and the Roumanian, each in his own way and in his own degree, suffered centuries of national extinction or decay in order that Western Europe might pursue undisturbed its task of civilization.

The battle of Kosovo, the great battle which sealed the fate of Serbian independence (June 28, 1389), has sometimes been called the Flodden of the Balkans, but it has always filled a far larger place in the imagination of the Serb than Flodden could ever fill in that of the Scot. The fatal “field of the black-

birds" has gathered round it a rich garland of heroic ballad poetry and romantic legend, which was first revealed to Western Europe by the German poet Herder in his charming collection of "Voices of the Nations" (*Stimmen der Völker*). A little later Goethe, avowedly adopting the version of an Italian priest and traveller, produced a very perfect translation of one of the masterpieces of Serbo-Croat ballad poetry—"The Wife of Hassan Aga"—and it was this which did much to stimulate interest in the admirable collections published during the twenties and thirties of last century by the great Serb philologist Vuk Karadžić. A rich assortment of popular tales, proverbs, and lyrical poetry was gathered orally by Vuk from the various Serbo-Croat provinces, but above all from Herzegovina, which, in matters of linguistic purity and style, is admitted to be the Tuscany of the Southern Slavs. In England I only know of three attempts at translation—those of that gallant literary pioneer Sir John Bowring, of the poet "Owen Meredith" (Lord Lytton), and of the late Madame Mijatović—all three long ago out of print.¹

The proverbs of a nation are often said to be a key to its character. Here then are a few:

The face of a wife shows what her husband is, the shirt of a husband shows what his wife is.

Though a cow may be black, her milk is white.

¹ An attractive volume of *prose* translations was published last year by Mr. V. Petrović, under the title "Hero-Tales of the Serbians."

A woman has long hair, but short brains.

Ill-gotten wealth never reaches the third generation.

God sometimes shuts one door, in order to open a hundred others.

Where the devil cannot cause mischief, he sends an old woman, and she does it.

A cheerful heart spins the flax.

Better let the village perish than its ancient customs.¹

Serb and Croat popular lyric poetry—Serb and Croat, it must be remembered, are two names for one and the same language, the sole difference being that the former is written in a reformed Cyrilline alphabet, the latter in Latin characters—is marked by great sweetness and originality; but it is the heroic ballads which have won for Serbia so unique a place in literature, beside those of the Anglo-Scottish border. It is worth insisting on the characteristic distinction drawn by the language between “feminine” (ženske), or lyrical, and “heroic” (junačke), or epic, poetry. The whole cycle of Kosovo ballads, and that other cycle which deals with the endless adventures of Marko Kraljević and his mythical horse Šarac, are to-day still a living reality to every peasant in Serbia, Bosnia, Dalmatia, and Croatia, and fill a place in their imagination such as it is difficult for us to realize.

A single poem can never supply the key to a whole literature, but I cannot refrain from quoting one which may suggest to others, as it did to myself

¹ See Mr. Mijatović's admirable book “Serbia of the Serbians.”

from the very first, analogies to the grim ballad of "The Twa Corbies," and to that wonderful passage of the Finnish Kalevala where the mother of Lennankainen mourns her dead son. The metre employed is almost invariably decasyllabic and unrhymed, with a cæsura in the middle of the line, on either side of which greater varieties of speed and scansion are attainable than in the facile but monotonous rhythms of Scott or Byron. Such a poem really defies translation, and the most I can aim at is to give some faint idea of the atmosphere of the original.

Dear God, how great a marvel !
 When the army camped on the field of Kosovo,
 And in that army nine Jugović brothers,
 And the tenth, the old Jug Bogdan.
 The mother of the Jugović prays to God,
 That He may give her the eyes of a falcon
 And the white wings of a swan,
 That she may fly to the Plain of Kosovo
 And may see the nine Jugović brothers,
 And the tenth, the old Jug Bogdan.

As she prayed, her prayer was granted.
 God gave her the eyes of a falcon
 And the white wings of a swan.
 Then she flies to the Plain of Kosovo.
 Dead she found the nine Jugović brothers,
 And the tenth, the old Jug Bogdan.
 And above them, nine spears of battle ;
 Perched on the spears, falcons nine ;
 Around the spears, nine good steeds ;

And beside them, nine grim lions.
 Then did they whinny, the nine good steeds ;
 Then did they roar, the nine grim lions ;
 Then did they scream, the nine falcons.
 E'en then the mother was hard of heart,
 And from her heart no tear did rise.

But she takes the nine good steeds,
 And she takes the nine grim lions,
 And she takes the nine falcons.
 Back she turns to her castle white.

From afar her sons' wives saw her :
 A little nearer they came to meet her.
 There was clamour of nine widows :
 There was weeping of nine orphans :
 There was neighing of nine good steeds :
 There was roaring of nine grim lions :
 There was screaming of nine falcons.
 E'en then the mother was hard of heart,
 And from her heart no tear did rise.

When night was come, and the midnight was there,
 Then the grey horse of Damian groaned.
 And Damian's mother asked his wife :
 " Daughter of mine and wife of Damian,
 " What sets the horse of Damian groaning ?
 " Can it be hunger for pure white corn ?
 " Can it be thirst for water of Zvečan ? "
 Then answered the wife of Damian :
 " It is not hunger for pure white corn :
 " It is not thirst for water of Zvečan.
 " It is, that Damian had taught him,
 " Till midnight, to feast on hay,
 " And after midnight, to take the road.
 " Now 'tis his master he is mourning,

“ For he will never bear him more.”
 E’en then the mother was hard of heart,
 And from her heart no tear did rise.

When morning came and break of dawn,
 There came flying two coal-black ravens.
 Bloody were their wings up to the shoulders.
 Round their beaks there clung white foam.
 And they carried the hand of a hero,
 And on the hand a wedding-ring of gold.
 They threw it into the mother’s lap.

The mother of the Jugović took the hand,
 She turned it round, she fondled it,
 And then she called the wife of Damian.
 “ Daughter of mine and wife of Damian,
 “ Couldst thou tell whose hand is this ? ”
 Then answered the wife of Damian :
 “ Mother of mine, O mother of Damian,
 “ This is the hand of our own Damian,
 “ For I do know the ring, my mother ;
 “ At the betrothal I did have it.”

The mother took the hand of Damian,
 She turned it round, she fondled it.
 Then to the hand she softly spake :
 “ O my hand, my fresh green apple,
 “ Where didst thou grow, where wert thou plucked ?
 “ ’Twas on my bosom thou didst grow ;
 “ The plucking, ’twas on Kosovo’s plain.”
 Speaking, she breathed her soul away.

The Serbs and Croats may fairly claim a special niche in the fane of literature for their ballad poetry. They also possess very charming songs; but musically these cannot for a moment compare with the

songs of certain other Slav races, especially the Slovaks, Czechs, and Ruthenes (Ukrainians). This is proved by the primitive nature of their national instruments—the *gusla*, or one-stringed fiddle, which supplies an ideal atmosphere for recitative verse, but cannot rank high in the musical world; and the bagpipes, which resemble, not the great warpipe of Scotland, but the more squeaky instrument of the Piedmontese Alps.

The whole heroic cycle of Kosovo has in the last few years found its apotheosis in the sculpture of Ivan Meštrović, a young Dalmatian Croat, who is giving expression to the dream of Serbo-Croat unity in stone. His remarkable designs for a Southern Slav Valhalla carried Rome by storm at the exhibition of 1911, and may, now that they are on exhibit at the Victoria and Albert Museum, reveal to London also the intensity of the Southern Slav ideal.

You may wonder why I have not spoken of the Church or of religious life. My answer is that there is no religious life in the Balkans, in the Western sense of the word, and equally so in the Russian sense. The Balkan Churches are mere formalist machines which exist for political propaganda. The dry bones are stirring, but they are still dry.

So far I have spoken mainly of the Serbs. But I want to emphasize the fact that Serbia is only a fragment of a far bigger question, the Southern Slav Question, which can only be treated and understood as a whole, and which this war has got to solve as a

whole, unless we are to have fresh wars in Europe. Serbia is not merely fighting for her independence and existence, but also for the liberation of her kinsmen, the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes of Austria-Hungary, and for the realization of National Unity. Hence the real question at issue is the future of eleven millions of people, inhabiting the whole eastern side of the Adriatic, from sixty miles north of Trieste as far as the Albanian mountains. Of these, only four millions live in the two independent Serb kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro (and it is to be remembered that the Montenegrins, who lie outside the scope of my present lecture, are pure Serbs, equally inspired by the idea of Unity, and will inevitably and rightly coalesce with their more advanced kinsmen after this war). The remaining seven millions inhabit Austria and Hungary, being cut up into a number of different provinces (Dalmatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia-Slavonia, Istria, Carniola) with varying forms of administration. It lies outside my present purpose to attempt any general survey of the growth of nationalism among the Southern Slavs. It is sufficient to point out the very conflicting attitude of the two Governments of the Dual Monarchy towards the problem—an attitude varying from neglect and indifference on the part of Austria to the grossest possible misgovernment and corruption on the part of Hungary. The Austro-Hungarian Foreign Office unhappily took its cue from the latter rather than from the former; and the result was the

European scandals connected with the Agram High Treason Trial, the Friedjung Trial, and the anti-Serb forgeries perpetrated by Austro-Hungarian diplomats. The national movement, which these scandals did so much to accentuate, culminated in April 1912, when the Hungarian Government, in defiance of all law, simply abolished the Croatian constitution, established a restrictive censorship which eclipsed even that of Russia at its most repressive period, and after a short interval illegally annulled the charter of the Serb Orthodox Church in Croatia-Slavonia. Thus it was the reactionary policy of the Magyar oligarchy which rendered ineffective and hampered at every turn the perfectly genuine desire of certain circles in Vienna to solve the Southern Slav Question in a "Habsburg" sense, and which yearly envenomed still further the relations of Austria-Hungary with the independent Serb States.

The monstrous *régime* of the dictator Cuvaj in Croatia was still at its height when the Balkan War broke out, and the contrast between Magyar misrule at home and the glorious victories of their free kinsmen across the Serbian frontier heightened the effect. The whole Southern Slav provinces of Austria-Hungary were carried off their feet by a wave of indescribable enthusiasm for Serbia and Montenegro. It is no exaggeration to assert that the cause of Southern Slav Unity "moved on" a whole generation in a few months. I shall never forget how, after an absence of barely a year, I returned to Dal-

matia during the Scutari crisis (April 1913), and was laughingly greeted by one of the leading Croat poets as Rip Van Winkle. And he was right. The whole outlook and spirit of the race had changed since my last visit, and my best friends were scarcely recognizable. As one of them said to me, "We have regained our belief in the future of our race."

What is most remarkable of all, the old dividing-line of religion between Orthodox Serb and Catholic Croat has been well-nigh effaced: it is only here and there that the last lingering traces of religious fanaticism can be found. In 1909 ultra-Clerical Croat fanatics organized a gang of young roughs to molest their progressive rivals on the streets of Agram; four years later some of these very men were fighting as volunteers in the Serbian army. When the news of the battle of Kumanovo reached Austria, a Catholic Croat bishop recited the *Nunc Dimittis*, thus proving that the spirit of the patriotic Bishop Strossmayer is reviving among the Croat episcopate. And I may quote my own last meeting with Southern Slavs on Austrian soil, barely a fortnight before the fatal crime of Sarajevo. My three friends were a Slovene Catholic priest, an Orthodox Serb from Bosnia, and a Croat Catholic student from Agram; all three were equally emphatic in their assertion that the old distinctions between Croat, Serb, and Slovene, between Catholic, Orthodox, and Moslem, were part of an evil past, and that in future all would be Southern Slavs. This incident

is in no way remarkable, but it is thoroughly typical.

As a prominent Croat Clerical deputy publicly declared during the Balkan War, "In the Balkan sun we see the dawn of our day." Two years ago all the Southern Slavs of Austria-Hungary protested in despair against the bare idea of an Austro-Serbian war, as being to them a civil war. And remember, for the last seven months that civil war has been going on before our eyes. For the idea of unity thousands of gallant Serbian soldiers have been dying; and on the same field thousands of others of their own race have died reluctantly, compelled by a brutal and perverse system to fight against their own blood-brothers. And many others have been shot like dogs in ruined villages, because they dared to sympathize with their kinsmen across a frontier which was artificially created against the wishes of themselves and their ancestors.

It is often asked: "What will Serbia get out of this war?" And there usually comes the superficial answer: "Oh, no doubt Bosnia and a port on the Adriatic." It cannot be emphasized too strongly that if Serbia gets Bosnia, that will settle nothing. Unless she can unite the race, it is better that she, and Montenegro too, should be overwhelmed and annexed to a reconstructed Austrian Empire. Deep down in the hearts of most thinking Serbs there lives a perception of this truth. As their own proverb says, it is better not to begin than not to finish.

In this country the movements for Greek and Italian

liberty and independence aroused great enthusiasm in their day. The movement for Southern Slav liberty and unity is far less known, but ought to kindle the same enthusiasm. Our statesmen, since the war began, have repeatedly declared that we are fighting for the principle of nationality, and there is no place in Europe where the issue is clearer than among the Southern Slavs and in Serbia, "the Belgium of the East." I have no hesitation in asking you to sympathize with Serbia and her Serbo-Croat and Slovene kinsmen, and to welcome the new State which is celebrating its baptism of fire, as a worthy member of the new and free Europe that is yet to be.

Serbo-Croat Orthography

š = *sh* in "ship."

č = *ch* in "church."

ć = *do.* (softer).

c = *ts* in "cats."

ž = *j* in French "jour."

j = *y* in "you."

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